REIs
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Creating and Promoting

Welcoming Learning Environments

A teacher training guide

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Welcome to our teacher training guide to **Creating and Promoting Welcoming Learning Environments**. This content is designed to share insights and experiences from the first 4 years (2016 - 2020) of OLIve programmes across Europe and the UK offered within the framework of the Refugee Education Initiatives project, co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

The Open Learning Initiative (OLIve) was born in 2016 as the result of a collaboration between various actors, to provide the best possible support for refugees, asylum seekers and other forced migrants. OLIve programmes prepare students to enter or re-enter higher education, to take advantage of employment opportunities, or to otherwise improve their chances in their country of arrival. OLIve is also about creating and promoting welcoming learning environments so our students and everyone involved in the programmes can enjoy intellectual exchange[1].

Initially offered in Budapest, Hungary, at Central European University, thanks to the Erasmus+ grant, OLIve programmes had been offered in 5 countries:

- Austria, at University of Vienna
- Germany, at Bard College Berlin
- Greece, at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
- Hungary, at Central European University and Open Education
- United Kingdom, at University of East London

This teacher training guide was designed to bring together insights from OLIve staff across Europe and the UK to create a foundation for future teachers in OLIve and OLIve-like programmes. It covers the following subject areas:

[1] Ian Cook, Open Education

1. **Teaching at OLIve:** Introduction to the programmes and what it means to participate in them as a teacher and as a student.
2. **Pedagogy:** Values and methodologies to use as guidelines and improve our practice.
3. **Practical Tips:** Steps to take to create a welcoming environment in the classroom.

We hope these modules will be helpful to any teacher in OLIve and in refugee education programmes and courses more in general as an inspiration for best practice. Teachers of specific subject areas may continue their training with the additional modules, addressing how to create welcoming learning environments in which to teach each of these subjects:

4. **Language Skills**
5. **Academic Skills and IT**
6. **Creative Skills**

These are accompanied by an audio series which features the 25 interviews carried out with staff and students and offers a more in-depth look at the following topics:

1. **Introduction**
2. **OLIve: History and Organisation**
3. **Teaching in Practice**
4. **Racism and Discrimination**
5. **Language Skills**
6. **Academic Skills and IT**
7. **Creative Skills**

They can be accessed at **https://www.refugeeeducationinitiatives.org/welcoming-environments.**

While this folder and the audio series accompanying each of the chapters collect a sizable amount of experience of OLIve staff and students across Europe and the UK, it is by no means representative of all OLIve locations and experiences. We hope that it is nonetheless informative and inspirational and that it can be one of many steps in consolidating a shared pedagogical and critical foundation in OLIve and in the refugee education community. We also hope that this folder can be of help to new teachers entering this community, informing them and preparing them to support and stand in solidarity with students in impactful and sustainable ways.

Introduction

Welcome to our teacher training guide on **Creating and Promoting Welcoming Learning Environments**.

The Open Learning Initiative is the result of a collaboration between actors and people who want to provide the best possible support for refugees, asylum seekers and other forced migrants. It prepares its students to enter or re-enter higher education, to take advantage of employment opportunities, or to otherwise improve their chances in their country of arrival. OLIve works actively to create and promote welcoming learning environments so our students and everyone involved in the programmes can enjoy intellectual exchange[2]. This is relevant work for a number of reasons.

In the past five years, the number of forcibly displaced people has increased dramatically. As a result of ongoing conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and many other countries, the world is witnessing the highest number of displaced persons globally since the end of World War II.[3] Persecution, conflicts and human rights violations continue to force people to flee their homes and seek safety in Europe and the UK. Many risk their lives to face a treacherous journey. Only in 2019, 63,311 people have attempted to reach Europe by sea.[4]

The top countries by origin of asylum seekers in the EU since 2014 are Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan, all countries with recent or ongoing conflicts. Between 2014 and 2017, a total of more than 919,000 Syrians applied for asylum in the EU.[5] Owing to the protracted nature of the world's ongoing crises and conflicts, the average length of

[2] Ian Cook, Open Education
[3] United Nations (2020)
[4] UNHCR (2019a)
[5] BBC (2019)

displacement is approximately 20 years. Access to basic social services, such as healthcare and education, is often limited, and only 1% of refugees have access to higher education.[6]

With forced displacement reaching historic levels, higher education institutions and other educational programmes all over the world are welcoming increasing numbers of refugees. Teachers are facing new challenges in making sense of forced displacement and its complexities. Teaching newcomers often comes with specific needs relating to language acquisition and adaptation to a new culture and environment. In addition, training and guidance for teachers of refugee students is not always based on best practice and is not always easily available.[7]

Education is recognised as a universal human right across a range of international legal frameworks. For most of us, education is how we feed curious minds and discover our life's passions.[8] It is also how we learn to look after ourselves – how to navigate the world of work, to organize our households, to deal with everyday chores and challenges. For refugee students, it is all that and more.[9] It is a helpful support to personal processes, providing structure and tools which may help recover a sense of purpose and dignity after the trauma of displacement. It is – or should be, when not impeded by systematic and specific barriers – a route to economic self-sufficiency, spelling an end to months or sometimes years of depending on others. It is also an important way to empower people, reawakening an awareness of their own worth and of the expertise which they bring to the table by virtue of their own unique experience.

Educational programmes for refugee students must support them in their country of arrival as well as offer projects and activities to promote a culture of living together and intercultural understanding that cherishes diversity. Promoting mutual understanding and respect for diversity, along

[6] UNHCR (2019a)
[7] UNHCR (2019b)
[8] UNESCO (2019)
[9] UNHCR (2017)

with countering all forms of intolerance and discrimination must be the priority, today more than ever. It is in this context that OLIve was born.

> "In 2016, a team of academics at the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest, Hungary, put together a proposal to start education programmes for displaced students across Europe, called Open Learning Initiative (OLIve), within a European consortium, Refugee Education Initiatives (REIs). These programmes recognised the role of quality education in protecting refugees and promoted sustainable solutions to the challenges they face in their adopted environments.[10] Hence, in response to the rising number of refugees arriving in Europe at the time, it aimed to extend access to university education. This would be achieved through offering pre-sessional courses to refugee learners aspiring to study in European universities via OLIve. The programme would take place in Budapest, Vienna and London in 2016-2018 and Budapest, Vienna, London, Berlin and Thessaloniki in 2018-2020. It presented the opportunity to share knowledge and best practice across the consortium to improve access to universities around Europe.
>
> The project received funding from the Erasmus+ programme in 2016, with CEU leading the project and University of Vienna, University of East London and European Network against Racism (ENAR) as partners. The main purpose of the programme is to foster social and economic inclusion of refugees and their integration into higher education through responding to existing barriers. Entry into higher education is achieved through assessing and validating previous learning and promoting inclusive learning practices. Additionally, the project aims at providing refugees with tools for durable social integration. This is facilitated through language learning, advocacy training and creative pedagogies which aim to build the learners' confidence. A further objective is to disseminate and scale up good practice beyond the immediate consortium. […]
>
> Many universities in Europe extended their offers at the same time. […] However, it is worth noting that these universities' responses also coincided with a rise in right-wing political discourse, tougher immigration control and new bordering regimes throughout Europe."[11]

10 UNHCR (2018)

11 Lounasmaa, Masserano, Oddy and Harewood (2020)

The consortium has developed separate models and practices to face each country's particularities, and of course any project in refugee education has its own characteristics and audience, but what can help us support our students is often shared. Some of the modules in this training are recommended to all, while some are targeted to teachers and tutors in specific subject areas. Feel free to spend more time on the ones that make more sense to you, but if you intend to teach at OLIve it might be helpful to go through the first three as they are intended as an overview of its history and practice..

Module 1: Teaching at OLIve

"Knowledge is power. When we come to OLIve, we come to be empowered."[12]

1. What are OLIve programmes?

OLIve takes a slightly different shape for each country, but its main deliverables include:

OLIve Weekend Programme (OLIve-WP): this programme has been offered at Central European University, Open Education, University of East London, University of Austria, and Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. It is a part-time programme (usually offered on Saturdays, though variations can be found across the institutions and cycles, to accommodate the needs of the participants), with classroom-based learning in the local language as well as English, training in relevant skills, and guest lectures in a range of topics. A cycle usually coincides to the duration of a semester in the host institution. OLIve-WP has the main aim of welcoming its students into an informal, non-degree learning environment framed within a university setting. It widely offers training in employability and academic skills. Other locally available content may include IT, communication, creative skills, and advocacy. Student-led groups such as peer support groups or conference presentation groups may also be facilitated or housed. It does not confer a degree, but universities in the same country are usually aware of, and accept, OLIve certifications.

OLIve University Preparatory Programme (OLIve-UP): during the REIs2 project, this programme has been offered at UEL and BCB. At UEL, instead of being placed in a separate programme, OLIve students are given tuition

[12] Interview with Landiswa Jessica Phantsi, University of East London

fee waivers to attend an intensive foundational skills course alongside other students who require it. This can include school leavers, students who were raised in foster care, international students, mature students, students with additional learning needs and others who have struggled in previous educational institutions. OLIve-UP has the main aim of assisting students with entering university. It has been found to be a supportive and suitable skills training and immersion into the local academic culture, allowing refugee and asylum seeker students to build relationships with the local student community. At BCB, OLIve-UP is a self-standing, 1-year, full-time university preparatory program, dedicated exclusively to participants with a refugee background, living in the European Economic Area. Students receive a tuition waiver and a stipend to cover their costs of living. The curriculum is designed along two main goals: supporting students in putting together a competitive application package for degree programs (mostly at master's level) and developing and strengthening academic skills necessary to be successful in a graduate program.

A further goal, common to both programmes, is to expand the borders of the university, to think about the university's social purposes and how inclusion and exclusion into higher education works.[13] Many OLIve teachers and practitioners work from a decolonial, anticolonial or antiracist angle and make sure that these values are carried out in their practice.

2. Who are OLIve students?

At OLIve, students are students first and foremost. It is important not to define or frame the students in terms of their status, background or current situation unless they express a wish to affirm these aspects of their experience. Some of the most positive feedback from former OLIve students expresses appreciation for how they were not made to feel like refugees.[14]

[13] Interview with Prem Kumar Rajaram, Central European University

[14] Interview with Aref Hossaini, University of East London

It is still helpful for teachers to be informed about the landscape of forced migration. OLIve students are forced migrants. They can be asylum seekers, refugees, people in refugee-like situations or people from vulnerabilised migration backgrounds. These are different categories of displaced people, each with specific needs.

- **Migrant:** a person moving from their place of usual residence to another for any reasons. It is important to be aware of the different way this term is being used and qualified in the language of the local OLIve programme. For example, in English “migrant” is sometimes used with more positive undertones than “immigrant” and “refugees” or “forced migrants” are often juxtaposed to “economic migrants”, as a way to imply that the former have a real need to migrate while the latter do not.
- **Displaced person:** a person who is forced to move from their place of usual residence because of war, persecution, environmental catastrophe or other dangers. People can be “internally displaced” when they move within the borders of their own country or “externally displaced” when they move across borders. There are currently 79,5 million displaced people across the globe, only 4 millions of which are in Europe. [15]
- **Asylum seeker**: a person who flees their native country because of fear of persecution and asks for international protection in a different country. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.”[16]While the term “refugee” is often used as a catch-all for all forcibly displaced people, when a forced migrant who is escaping persecution has reached a new country and applied for asylum but their application has not been accepted, legally they are an asylum seeker, not a refugee.

15 UNHCR (2020a)
16 United Nations (2015)

- **Refugee:** an asylum seeker whose application for asylum has been accepted, granting them refugee status. According to the Refugee Convention of 1951, a refugee is "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." [17]These are of course not the only reasons why people are persecuted in their origin countries, and other important examples include sexual identity and gender orientation. How easy or difficult migration will be for a certain person often depends on what citizenship they hold.
- **Refugee-like or vulnerabilised migrant**: people who are outside their country of origin and who are exposed to dangers and issues similar to refugees, but whose legal status has not been ascertained.[18]
- **Citizenship:** the legal bond between an individual and a country, ensuring that someone's rights are recognised under the law of that country and internationally. Stateless people do not have citizenship of any country and as such are particularly vulnerable. This status can result from oppression of one group by another, or from lack of documentation. For example, Palestinians are the largest stateless community in the world as the Palestinian state is not recognised by the international community[19] but the majority of stateless migrants in Southern Europe are so because they are unable to produce documents when registered at arrival. [20]

The situation of refugees in education is different for each of the countries OLIve operates in. It is not expected or realistic that you should know the often intricate details of immigration law in your country, and if approached by students for information you should always be clear about what information you do and do not hold or can be expected to research

[17] UNHCR (2020a)
[18] UNHCR (2020b).
[19] Shiblak, A. (2006).
[20] UNHCR (2019c)

for them. However, it is important to have updated information about what your students' rights are relative to education, so that you know how to best support your students within the programme.

3. Barriers

OLIve students and students from marginalised backgrounds more in general encounter a number of barriers which they must constantly push back against in order to be able to pursue higher education. Some of these barriers will be similar to those encountered by local students who are marginalised, and some will be different and unique to their situation.

It is crucial that the teachers are familiar with these barriers but it is even more important that the teachers always believe the students when they state they are facing one.

Refugees and asylum seekers are targets of a culture of mistrust embedded in the systems of border control[21], ranging from the cross-examinations they must sustain from immigration officials to the attitude that people in the country of arrival may have. Teachers must trust students and hold them in regard as the experts about their own situation. While students may welcome and even seek advice, it is good practice to make sure we understand and are informed about their situation before we speak, and that we do so in a sensitive way.

Here is a list of common barriers, identified by OLIve students:

> "**Immigration status:** While most asylum seekers have the right to study [...] as long as their case is active, this right is not widely known and many universities and educational institutions are still reluctant to accept us. Often, when we call and inquire about our right to study, the people we speak to in these institutions do not know that we have the right to study and they turn us away.
>
> **Access to finance:** Asylum seekers and those who have temporary leave to remain are not eligible to apply for government-provided student loans, nor

21 Katharine Sarikakis, University of Vienna

other types of related student finance including hardship funds, bursaries and travel funds. For those with refugee status, access to student finance is limited […]

Recognition of previous qualifications: Many of us do not have access to our transcripts and for those of us who have copies, the cost of having them translated and validated is prohibitive. […]

Language requirements: To accept a place in a university we are required to provide evidence of our […] language competence. […] Many universities are inflexible with what they accept as proof of competence, requiring [certifications which must be sat in the country of arrival] even when other documentation can prove similar attainment. Sitting [these exams] is costly and the waiting time for a […] test can be several weeks. Arranging and paying for a […] test is often impossible within the timeframe available after having secured both a place to study and a scholarship or student finance.

Trauma and ongoing struggles to live a dignified life: Experiences of trauma – escaping war, conflict and violence, and then being put in the asylum process – cause post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression and other mental health difficulties. This reduces our ability to engage in application processes and our studies. We need additional support and information in order to navigate these processes without them causing us further anxiety and exclusion.

Academic skills and culture: Even though many of us have been to university before, the expectations […] are different and the culture is unfamiliar. Not being able to express our thoughts in perfect [academic language] can mean people underestimate our intelligence and skills. We have all had our educational path interrupted by conflict, war, violence and displacement. There are gaps in our education which are difficult to bridge, and for which we need additional support, but these gaps are not an indication of lack of ability or drive.

Lack of support and exclusion: We often struggle to access mental health services, childcare support and information about our rights. We are being moved into housing in areas where there are no educational opportunities, and we do not have adequate funds to travel to available courses. Those of us whose asylum claims are unsuccessful end up losing our housing and benefits altogether. It is virtually impossible to study and make progress in the face of such pressures.

Lack of access to information: Although some opportunities are available (including generous scholarships for asylum seekers), information about services, funding opportunities, policies and practices regarding higher education is difficult to access. Some of us have been offered places in universities and invited to come and enrol, only to be told on arrival that we cannot start as our status does not permit access to student finance.

Changing policies: Ever-changing policies make it even harder to know our rights regarding education and mean that many educational institutions are reluctant to support us. In 2017, [in the UK], some of us were banned from studying by a randomly applied immigration bail condition. Although the decisions were later overturned, this took several months, further increasing the gap since we last studied and further damaging our confidence."[22]

OLIve students have likened trying to progress in the educational system while their case is being processed by the immigration authorities to "a game of snakes and ladders", where a step forward may mean several steps back, and their rights are constantly put into discussion. [23]

4. Who are OLIve teachers?

OLIve teachers come from a range of backgrounds, both academic and practice-based.

Some of us are **staff of various ranks in teaching and/or research** in the university where our local OLIve takes place, or are qualified teachers elsewhere, and have joined to make our contribution. While we bring a high level of knowledge and experience to the classroom, we must also be mindful of the power dynamics that can emerge. We may especially need training in how to adapt our teaching practices to multi-level classrooms and how to provide support to students who may face barriers and issues we are not privy to or experienced with.

[22] Lounasmaa, A., Esenowo, I. and OLIve students (2019)

[23] OLIve UEL conference group meeting with Pearlgin Lindiwe Goba, Landiswa Jessica Phantsi and Fraidoon Poya

Some of us are **students and/or junior researchers** in the university where our local OLIve takes place, usually at MA or PhD level, who want to gain teaching experience in an ethically sound environment. Being a student often helps create informal relationships with OLIve learners, who may recognise themselves in some of your traits, for example being a non-native language speaker or a mature student, and feel encouraged by it. They may also find us more approachable than the project leaders, meaning we may have a better chance to create a less formal, more supportive relationship with them. We may especially need training to cover areas that we are less experienced in.

Some of us are **OLIve alumni** returning to share our skills with new cohorts. While no single person can speak for any group, it is reasonable to believe that former students will be best positioned to know what works and does not inside and outside the classroom, and our expertise should be taken into the highest account. We can help students feel represented, and like their educational journey has an effective chance to end in inclusion. We may especially need training to cover areas that we are less experienced in.

Some of us are **practitioners**, who are experienced in working with marginalised populations in different contexts. Past and current examples include educators, psychologists, poets, and yoga teachers.

What each of us brings to the table is different - it's the goals that are shared.

5. The role of teachers

Countless studies show that the teacher is the most important in-school factor affecting the quality of education. In refugee contexts, where learning materials and classroom space are often in short supply, the role of the teacher is particularly important to quality education, as a teacher is sometimes the only resource available to students.[24] Beyond simply being

[24] Richardson, E., MacEwen, L. & Naylor, R. (2018)

present to teach, teachers play several critical roles in providing education to refugee students.

First, teachers provide a source of continuity and normality, attending to their physical, cognitive and social needs. Second, their direct work with refugee students can be critical in helping restore a sense of stability and confidence. In addition, teachers can help support recovery and transition post-conflict and after emergencies, and can promote security, peace and human rights, both in their home countries upon return and in host countries, where they may stay indefinitely. Teachers can have an immense influence on their students' learning. Education can both enhance and hinder conflict, as can teachers.[25] Finally, teachers can provide tools to empower their students to move into their arrival cultural and societal landscape with a critical attitude. Refugees and asylum seekers are often disempowered by complex systems of oppression. They may feel that there are demands on them to integrate uncritically and not always be able to speak up and have their voice be heard, or express their criticism of existing structures and situations. A critical education is crucial to countering the effects of these racist and oppressive power dynamics.

While teachers have great potential to positively affect refugee students' lives, teacher development and training is in most cases largely neglected during conflict. In refugee and emergency settings, teacher professional development that helps new teachers with contingency planning, awareness of violence/attack, and psychosocial emotional learning challenges is paramount but is often missing.[26] Teachers need training, especially to be able to handle spontaneous situations.

Despite evidence that points to the importance of psychosocial programmes in schools for the long term, the majority of education systems have not yet adapted. Teachers also need training on the language of instruction, the curriculum and pedagogical skills for multi-grade classrooms and classrooms with special needs learners and/or

[25] ibid.
[26] Richardson, E., MacEwen, L. & Naylor, R. (2018)

learners who have not been in education previously or have had negative experiences. It is also important that teachers of refugee students have training on ways to reinforce and support social cohesion strategies. In sum, teachers of refugee students are working in complex environments, where class sizes are typically large and classrooms are comprised of learners of different cultures, ages, academic backgrounds, and learning abilities. As such, training and ongoing support are critical for us.[27]

It is evident to all those who have worked teaching marginalised and displaced populations that each student has a different history and brings with them different needs. Learning how to respond to those is an important part of your work as a teacher. While responses must be personalised to the students, there are certain things we can do across the board to make sure we operate professionally, critically and in a welcoming way.

[27] ibid.

Module 2: Pedagogy

"I would tell to the future teachers that you are a part of a big change. Maybe you have a tiny role or maybe a very big role, but overall you're gonna be a part of someone's future."[28]

1. Pedagogy and values

OLIve teachers take inspiration from a number of student-centred pedagogies, with the goal of ensuring that the student is involved with their own education every step of the way and the teacher is aware of, and supports, each student's specific needs. In order to enact a pedagogical framework that emphasises the need to acknowledge and respond to student differences, teachers must have two important attributes: cultural competence and socio-political consciousness.[29] This will be a short overview of helpful concepts and methods which encompass OLIve's values and can serve as an inspiration.

1.1 Intersectionality

Intersectionality means the way the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, religious discrimination, ableism...) combine in the lives of marginalised people.[30] To be intersectionally marginalised means to be feeling the

[28] Interview with Aref Hossaini, University of East London
[29] Brown-Jeffy, S. and Cooper, J. E. (2011)
[30] Crenshaw (1989)

weight of multiple oppressive structures. Many of the students will be facing interlocking combinations of barriers and discrimination. An early example of intersectional thinking can be found in Audre Lorde's work and her insight that recognising the differences in our life experiences is key to respecting each other working better together.[31]

These are all instances that apply to any students from marginalised populations. Going through life while feeling the effects of multiple systems of oppression is exhausting and takes a lot of energy and resources. For example, a woman from Somalia being a refugee could mean that she encounters legal and financial barriers because of her legal status, which separates her from locals and prohibits her to work; that she is exposed to racist discrimination because of being a person of colour; and that she experiences sexism or must deal with childcare because of being a woman. This has an effect on her educational experience in that she may not be able to afford transport to class, may be distressed when she is there because of a racist remark that she got on the way, and may not be able to pay attention because she has a child with her. Her educational experience is shaped by these factors, and she must be treated with patience and understanding and supported to make the best of her journey.

Intersectionality does not mean reducing people to what we think are their traits. For example, the student above may feel more affinity with other women who do not share her nationality but do share her experience of sexism and childcare. It is also important to note that promoting critical thinking is not the same as listing the ways in which people are victimised and made to feel powerless. Some pedagogies focus on how to turn these experiences from a source of trauma and disempowerment to a rich knowledge of what it means to be a person in a world that must be changed.

1.2 Antiracism and decoloniality

[31] Lorde (1984)

Research shows that teachers are not always ideologically prepared to support their ethnically and culturally diverse students.[32] Working with refugee students does not only mean not holding racist beliefs, it also means being aware of your positionality and working actively on yourself and your teaching practice to antiracist and decolonial ends. The basic education of candidate teachers and the systematic training of active teachers are necessary conditions in order to support the transformation of negative views towards what we might categorise as 'other', whether they are acknowledged to exist or not. In order for teacher education to lead to transformative learning,[33] it is important that it has a strong experiential character, giving the opportunity for more privileged teachers to reflect on our views and attitudes towards otherness. Whether through training programmes, self-education methods and exchange of knowledge and experiences, we must aim at providing effective education and support to refugee students, as well as being accountable to them.

To improve our practice and make it more antiracist and decolonial, we can:

- **treat students as students first.** Students should be treated as such; the fact that they are refugees should come after, and be relevant only if and when the students want it to be so. Students have remarked on this helping them to feel welcome[34].
- **be aware of our positionality.** Some of us will belong to more privileged groups than others, and even those teachers who experience marginalisation in their daily life will still be in a better legal position than a refugee student. While there is much we can have in common with our students, their current position is something that we have to be aware of and sensitive about.
- **take unconscious bias training.** Living in a racist society means we are exposed daily to systemic racism, and if we are from a privileged

[32] Magos, K. (2006)
[33] Mezirow, J. (2003)
[34] Interview with Aref Hossaini, University of East London

ethnic group, we are at risk of reproducing it without knowing. While there are very divergent opinions about whether this type of training is worth it and some think it can actually be used to divert attention from actual racism in the institution, it is an opportunity to address beliefs and behaviours we might not know we have. If your institution offers this, you might want to look into it.[35]

- **not expect gratefulness.** Refugees often feel an immense pressure to express feelings of gratefulness when receiving support.[36] OLIve teachers must not reproduce more traditionalist models viewing support to marginalised people as charity which is deserving of thankfulness. We must work towards solidarity and empowerment instead.[37]
- **decolonise our curriculum.** Many of us will have studied in Western educational institutions where the curriculum was overwhelmingly white and male. There is a world of material out there which we can use to replace less diverse content in our teaching. We can tweak this to ensure that our students are represented and feel empowered by seeing that their contribution may also one day be part of the curriculum. This may also be an irreplaceable opportunity for teachers to update their knowledge. Examples and resources on how to do this are available online[38].
- **improve our decolonial knowledge.** Many subjects can benefit from adding an introduction to imperialist and colonial history to their curriculum. This is a topic that interests all students directly and that everyone will have local knowledge and opinions about. You do not need to be an expert in the field: simple concepts, timelines and maps will be enough to start the discussion. As a teacher, you can provide an overall view and help the students link concepts and events.

35 Interview with Jessica Oddy, University of East London
36 Nayeri (2019)
37 Interview with Aura Lounasmaa, University of East London
38 SOAS (2018)

1.3 Trauma-informed teaching

By the time they get to OLIve or any refugee education programme, many students will have experienced a chain of traumatic events, which are rarely isolated and are associated with separation from and loss of family members, poverty, and lack of health care and education.[39] The psychosocial well-being of refugees includes their overcoming of traumatic experiences, reacquiring a sense of safety and a sense of self, and adjusting to expectations of the new culture while being able to retain cherished values of the homeland[40]. Psychologically, there is much that can be producing stress and hindering the students' learning:

- **cultural transition:** Perhaps the most important task faced by refugees is acculturation, or the need to learn the new culture in order to function within it. Pressure to assimilate and feelings of exclusion from not integrating can both be a source of stress. Having to take lower-skilled jobs, culturally different gender role expectations and parents being dependent on children for language or financial reasons are all factors that can add new stresses.[41]
- **self-confidence:** many students struggle to feel like they belong in an educational environment. Thomas and Collier (1997) suggest that students with low literacy, interrupted schooling, and traumatic experiences might be expected to take 10 years or more to catch up to normative levels of cognitive and academic language. Pedagogical frameworks in universities are more often than not unresponsive to these factors, with the students having to constantly play catch-up.
- **trauma:** discussions of psychosocial adjustment of refugees often point to the complexities of post-traumatic stress disorder or the difficulties of moving on from traumatic memories, with nearly 70% of refugees from war-affected backgrounds retaining stressful

[39] Amnesty International, 2002; UNHCR, 2008
[40] McBrien, J. L. (2005)
[41] Kanu, Y. (2008)

memories and 80% being concerned about separation from family five years after their flight.[42] Trauma may also rightly affect a student's trust in authority and institutions, including in educational ones.

As teachers and practitioners in refugee education, it is essential to be trained so that we can respond to these challenges appropriately and support the students in the way they need while also looking after our own mental health. Here are some suggestions for creating and promoting welcoming learning environments in a way that is mindful and compassionate to trauma:

- **Be aware.** Refugee survivors differ greatly in how open and capable they are about talking about their past experiences. In general the classroom is not the most suitable environment for opening up about trauma and loss, but it may come up in some way, and it is good to be prepared for that as a teacher.
- **Have good boundaries.** In general the best approach is to be open, empathetic, supportive, but also aware of your personal and professional boundaries as a teacher. Make good judgements about when it's necessary to direct a person who needs to talk about sensitive matters towards the right professional and to do this in a peaceful and safe manner. This is equally important and necessary for the protection of the group, the affected individual and for yourself as a teacher.
- **Be positive and mindful.** In general, if the issue of the past comes up, or if you wish to bring it into your curriculum for professional reasons, stick to positive aspects and memories of the past. Even this can be tricky or sensitive, as not all refugee students may be emotionally capable of connecting to positive experiences at the time, and even positive memories can trigger feelings of loss and

[42] McBrien, J. L. (2005)

pain. So be very careful and mindful, take things slowly and use your best judgment.

- **Think about the group.** You should take into consideration the capacity and sensitivity of the whole group. Also, the level of disclosure in the group should always be adjusted to the most sensitive student's threshold. This means that every single student should be comfortable with the conversation, and not only the majority. This also means that if there is a highly sensitive student who may be suffering from the impact of their experiences, making sure that they are safe should be the basis of your judgement about group activities and conversations. The most sensitive student should guide your "standard" for the whole group." [43]

This topic is covered in-depth in the **Trauma-Informed Teaching** module by clinical psychologist and OLIve consultant Adrienn Kroó. Please refer to it as this is merely a summary of some of its content.

1.4 Student-centred pedagogies

Alternative pedagogies aim to challenge traditional teaching methods and relationships in favour of a more egalitarian experience. Two which have been signposted by current OLIve staff are:

- **Pedagogy of the Oppressed:** This pedagogy aims to change the traditional teacher-student relationship that makes the teacher an active subject and the student a passive object. In traditional methods, the teacher talks about reality as a series of disconnected facts which the students have to memorise without necessarily understanding the meaning. The students are like containers to be filled with information by the teacher. Creativity is not in use. This pedagogy counters the traditional method with "problem-posing education": "Problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to

[43] Interview with Adrienn Kroó, Cordelia Foundation

domination must fight for their emancipation. [...] Problem-posing education does not and cannot serve the interests of the oppressor. No oppressive order could permit the oppressed to begin to question: Why?" In problem-posing education, everyone can teach because everyone is an expert about their own experience. For example, in an English class this may involve having the students take a round of the words they know about a topic, using them to teach pronunciation, and making an illustrated dictionary for the classroom out of them. In a performance-based creative skills class, this could take inspiration from Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, where the students construct a scenario inspired by their lives and act it out.[44]

- **Socratic method:** Taking its name from the ancient Greek philosopher who introduced it, it is also known as "maieutics", which means "midwifery", referring to the way it helps the student "give birth" to their own ideas. In Socratic pedagogy, the teacher is not filling the students' heads with notions, but respectfully guiding the student to discover concepts through a dialogue in which the teacher asks careful questions that support the students. The teacher does not play devil's advocate or try to put the student into discomfort, but rather asks logical questions that help the student put the topic into focus. This can be helpful to the students to understand what they already know, what they don't know, and what they need to know in order to come to an informed conclusion on a certain topic. For example, if the topic at hand is vaccines and the lecturer wants the students to question their own knowledge and ideas about it, the lecturer may ask "How do vaccines work?" "Why are they mandatory?" "Is this good?" "Is this based in research?" "What is good research?"[45]

[44] Freire (1968), Radical Education Forum (2017)

[45] Fuglei, M. (2018)

The Socratic method also often focuses on common sense, shared values and the ethics of how people ought to live, which makes it suited for facilitating intercultural discussions about unity and diversity.[46]

Module 3: Practical tips

"A welcoming environment is a space whereby there's no discrimination, there are no margins created because of legal status, mental health or physical disability; whereby you are all recognised as human beings, and you have the dignity, you're being honoured, your voices are being heard and your interests are being explored."[47]

In this module, we will address what can be done to create a welcoming environment when teaching various subjects to marginalised populations. Some measures should be taken regardless of subject and adopted by all.

1. Getting to know the students

1.1 Be informal.

Many of the students will not have been in a higher education context before or will have had negative experiences with education altogether. As with local students who are not from backgrounds where attending university is expected or encouraged, they may feel uncomfortable even just using the facilities or have very traditional ideas about what the correct way to interact with a teacher is. This can hinder them in very real ways, for

[46] Interview with Petra Herczeg, University of Vienna

[47] Interview with Pearlgin Lindiwe Goba, University of East London

example if they do not dare approaching you for questions or support. Maintaining a professional but informal tone can help students feel more at ease in the space and with you.

1.2 Build relationships.

Learn the students' names and their correct pronunciation as a simple and effective way to make people feel recognised and respected. Introduce yourself to the students individually as you get the chance to do so. Get a sense of their background and their interests so you can support them better and tell them a little about yours so that the conversation doesn't feel one-sided. Do not only rely on the classroom to build relationships with the students. If you are sharing any spaces with them within the university facilities, such as common rooms or study rooms, consider spending some time in those spaces together with them so you have more opportunities to get to know them in an unstructured setting.

1.3 Educate yourself.

Be informed about the students' needs and backgrounds. Most of the time, the students will be more than happy to answer questions you might have about their country of origin or their cultural background but be prepared to do your own research. Collecting and disseminating accurate information and cultural knowledge may reduce prejudice and support a positive change of attitudes at institutional level.

1.4 Encourage students to interact with each other.

You may want to introduce students with similar backgrounds or interests, or to introduce new students to students who have already been in the programme for a few weeks. If your programme or course has a peer support group, make sure that the students know about this, explain what it is for and prompt them about whether they have tried it.

2 Accessibility

2.1 Make sure that the space is inclusive.

This can mean:

- arranging the classroom so that the students are not all facing the same way and in lines, but are sitting in groups and you can move across them. This facilitates a less formal teaching environment and makes it easier for smaller groups of students to interact.
- displaying visual material that promotes a multicultural ethos in shared spaces. These can also be suggested or made by the students as part of their classes or presentations. If you are using spaces where you cannot hang material on the walls, perhaps you can provide leaflets or other free printed material and leave it around. Directly encourage the students to take it as they may not know it is allowed to do so.
- making sure that students who must have access to specific spaces do, for example by ensuring that Muslim students have access to prayer rooms.
- if you are providing food, making sure you are mindful of people's dietary restrictions, for example by bringing vegetarian food who will be eaten by Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist students alike.
- making sure that the space is accessible to people with disabilities, for example by moving tables around so that a person using a wheelchair or crutches can move around more easily. If the facilities you have been assigned for your class present problems for some of your students, for example your mobility impaired students have to climb steps or are too far from the toilets, bring it up with the organisers to look for solutions.
- making sure that the classes are accessible to people with disabilities, for example by prioritising comfortable seating arrangements for people with mobility issues, printing handouts and making powerpoints using coloured backgrounds for people with visual stress or dyslexia (light yellow works well).

2.2 Do not assume students have access to resources.

OLIve, your programme or course may provide access to libraries and printing facilities, email addresses or other resources, and you may also want to provide extra material yourself. The students may need guidance to access and should not be expected to find out how things work for themselves. For example, if you are giving your class a link to a free pdf, you will have to walk them through all of the steps necessary to download it. In the same way, if you plan to give them activities in or out of the classroom which involve, for example, phones and a working internet connection, make sure that all of your students have access to those before you do. If this is not the case, you should probably switch to activities which will not exclude anyone. For the same reasons, it's probably not a good idea to assign homework unless the students ask for it.

2.3 Be patient.

Refugee students often find the classes overwhelming. They may appear scared and confused when they first attend classes. Many will be dealing with traumas and managing everyday activities, which would be simple for you, might be quite complex for them. Until they can adjust to the demands of their new school environment (even if they have interpreters), they may have difficulty absorbing information. Many students will have a good grasp of the language you are communicating in, but many may not and will need guidance and encouragement. Be patient and let your student set the speed at which you will be operating. Whether you are teaching or having a conversation with someone, adjust your pace. If students are not participating in class and don't appear to comprehend the subject matter, it doesn't mean that they are not learning[48]. Present the programme in an accessible way. Some of the students will not be familiar with the content of some of the courses. For example, they may not have been in higher education before and hence not know what

[48] UNHCR (2019b)

academic skills training might involve. They may also not see the point in some of the activities. For example, they may not think a creative skills course is useful unless concrete instances of how they will be using that skill are given. This will be treated specifically in the modules dedicated to each course.

3 Relating to students

3.1 Be reliable.

Provide a constant and stable pattern of contact. Attending a weekly course can provide structure and reassurance to students whose lives may otherwise be chaotic, frightening or out of their control in important respects. If you are not holding a weekly class, tell the students when they will be able to see you or talk to you. If you have volunteered support and are unable to provide it, inform the students accordingly so that they are not unsettled and are able to search for other solutions.[49]

3.2 Be clear about your role.

It is possible that, because you are part of an educational institution, some students will overestimate your role and think you can provide support in ways that you cannot, or that because you are a resident of their country or arrival, they will overestimate how much information you have about some aspects of its institutions, culture or society. For example, a student may think that because you are part of an institution or organisation you can grant them access to funding or hardware, or that you know some details you do not about how the immigration system works in the country you both are in. Clearly explain to the students what areas you can provide them with support in, and be upfront about what you cannot do and do not know.

3.3 Have good boundaries.

It is also likely that some students will need your support beyond teaching hours or after the programme is finished and may rely on it for

[49] Interview with Pearlgin Lindiwe Goba, University of East London

recommendation letters for scholarships or jobs or other forms of support. This may be something you are willing to do, or it may not be. Think about what you want to offer, including what personal contacts you are comfortable sharing with the students and why. It is not problematic to be in touch with the students within normal professional boundaries, but make sure that you never volunteer support that they will be counting on and struggle to replace if you are not sure you will be able to deliver it.

3.4 Tell students you will listen.

Don't pressure students to tell their stories in front of the class as they might be traumatic and difficult to recount. Make sure that the students know you take them seriously and are available to listen to their individual experiences and issues if and when they are ready. They may have questions and they may also decide to tell you about themselves. Let the students know when and how it is appropriate to talk to you in specific terms. For example, you may tell them that if they wait in the room after the class is finished, you will stay in the room to speak with them. Listen actively and be engaged: the decision to trust you may not have been an easy one.

4 Classroom management

4.1 Make space for interventions in the classroom.

While you may want to get on with the lecture or activity you have prepared, the reasons why a student may want to speak up are usually valid. It is important to give students an idea of the formal environment they will find themselves in at university or work, but it is even more important that they feel like their voice is heard in the space they are in and that they are not rebuffed for expressing themselves. Speaking up may not be easy for them and it should generally be encouraged. If people are very quiet, repeat their words to the class. If they get interrupted, make sure you calmly protect their right of word. Be ready to pick up on awkward silences by offering examples of your own.

4.2 Encourage collaboration.

Foster a cooperative environment where the students feel that they can support each other rather than compete with each other. Peer pressure on students who already are under a lot of strain by factors independent of their own will might easily backfire and affect their performance negatively.[50] Research and integrate ways to do groupwork in your subject area or your practice, so that the students get used to learning from each other and to helping each other through tasks rather than racing to the finishing line. This also gives them a more active role in their own learning process.

4.3 Be antiracist.

Your students may have encountered countless instances of racism and discrimination before they got to your classroom. As mentioned before, they face multiple barriers and must be believed when they speak about it. As a teacher, you must also be aware of what privileges you may bring to the classroom, so that you can offer the best possible support to your student. Finally, the curriculum you teach and the way you teach it must respond to the diversity in your classroom. If you are not sure how to do this, ask colleagues or research available toolkits.[51]

4.4 Be mindful of gender dynamics.

People who belong to marginalised genders may have a harder time speaking in public than men. Marginalised genders include all women, all trans people, and all non-binary people; a person can be one or more of these. Some OLIves have non-mixed gender classrooms to better support their learners. If you are in a mixed gender classroom, make sure that it is not only men who take part in the conversation as they may be more used to expressing themselves publicly. For example, if your lecture is about engineering, the men in the room may feel they know more and have more to contribute as engineering is a

[50] Interview with Rania Zayed, Bard College Berlin

[51] SOAS (2019)

traditionally male occupation worldwide. Gently ask questions that involve gendered experience to involve the other people present, for example ask the room why they think there is a majority of men studying engineering or if anyone has experienced wanting to study but having to do childcare instead.

4.5 Be mindful of the topic you are discussing.

Many refugees have experienced violence, war and loss and may have strong reactions to related topics, so it is best to keep this in mind when teaching even when the lecture does not directly address the topic. For example, a lecture about British colonialism in the Indian subcontinent might evolve into a discussion about current Hindu-Muslim relations, and some students might be moved to think about their personal experiences of anti-Muslim violence or want to debate their different views about religion. But the list of sensitive topics does not stop at the ones most evidently related to life as a refugee. It is best to be sensitive as to what topics might bring up traumas, unpleasant memories or strong emotional reactions. It is also quite possible that there will be accompanied small children in class, and that the accompanying adults do not want them to be exposed to topics they may be too young for. Another example may be a discussion of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*[52], which involves rape, must be signposted in advance and in clear terms by telling the class that a discussion of sexual violence is coming up and that some people may want to leave the room and return after the time set for the discussion has passed.

5 Values

5.1 Be trustworthy.

Treat disclosures from students professionally and with compassion. Do not share any sensitive information that the students come to you with other staff unless they constitute a danger to themselves or others. If a student has a request which they came to you with and do not want to

[52] Walker (1982)

share with the rest of staff, but you have to consult the rest of staff about it, you can do so anonymously.

5.2 Teach in a trauma-informed way.

Your students are attempting to learn, adapt to a new environment and process a complex life journey, most likely including traumas, all at the same time. Because of this, they cannot be expected to proceed through education in the same way as local university students. While refugee students can often face the same oppressions as intersectionally marginalised students in your institution (Lounasmaa et al), their situation is a separate and particular instance and must be treated accordingly. It is your task to adapt your teaching, your expectations and your conduct towards them to accommodate the situation they are in. More information on this in the **Trauma-informed Teaching** module.[53]

5.3 Build a strong professional community.

Have conversations with other teachers about best practice, including how to respond to the students' needs as a diverse population, how to maintain rapport, and to share challenges, successes and failures. Asking other teachers and organisers about specific people's support needs might be a good idea. If you have access to that information through your administration, consult it beforehand so that you have a better idea of how to support the students effectively. This will help all of us to formulate better strategies and may also help provide emotional support to teachers if needed.

[53] LINK

Module 4: Language

"I'm a language junkie, I'm really heavily enamoured with languages. Language at OLIve was great because we learned in groups and then the teachers were really passionate. That is really important, having a teacher who is passionate about what he or she is saying, and you can see that and take it even more seriously and even have fun whilst learning."[54]

One of the main components of OLIve programmes in all the participating universities is developing the students' proficiency in English and, in some of the institutions, local languages. Language courses are offered as a compulsory part of the programme, to which all students participate. Because of the essential skills they provide, they are often the backbone of any refugee education initiative.

1. How to present the course

The approach will have to vary depending on whether English or the local language is being taught. Because of the prevalence of English internationally, the students may place less value on learning local

[54] Interview with Joel Mordi, University of East London

languages, which may change how easy or difficult it is to motivate people to learn the local language. But when choosing to stay in another country, although English can be a big help in the beginning, it is essential to surpass that obstacle and learn the local language. For example, Greek OLIve staff report of students mostly not planning to stay in the country, which makes them potentially less motivated to learn Greek.[55] On the other hand, this is not always the case. At Open Education there is now a cohort of younger students who speak Hungarian, meaning that OLIve has started offering classes in Hungarian alongside English to meet the students' demands.[56]

Developing proficiency in English and local languages is "essential and critical to assist social cohesion, successful resettlement and wellbeing of refugees"[57]. Lack of recognition of the students' prior learning and professional qualifications can often mean they will end up in low-status menial jobs if and when their refugee status gets approved, while lack of proficiency in the English and local language may lead some students to become dependent on others for everyday activities such as visiting the doctor, banking, or sorting out utility bills. [58]

It may therefore be important to explain to students that both English and the local language are crucial to:

- **education and career,** giving them a wider range of opportunities and generally opening doors. Remind them that they can also count on their home language or languages, which means they have plenty of tools!
- **social life,** as they will make it easier to mix with locals and international people, create deeper relationships and build a support network of friends and acquaintances. We all need one to survive.

55 Interview with Ioanna Kostarella and Despina Kazana, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
56 Interview with Ian Cook, Open Education
57 McBrien, J. L. (2005)
58 Kanu, Y. (2008)

- **independence,** so that they can understand information, speak for themselves, not have to rely on others in situations where they will be making decisions and are able to tell their own story. Their voices should be heard.

For a lot of people, it is difficult to learn a new language. Adults, especially older ones, cannot learn a new language as fast as a young person. Therefore, a large number of older migrants give up fast. At the same time, younger migrants who want to learn the language do not always have the right motivation or help to proceed.[59]

2. Preparation

2.1 Think about your pedagogy. You might want to make sure your approach is intercultural and responsive enough for a class of people who come from diverse language backgrounds and will have a different and wide-ranging level of the language you are teaching, as well as will be dealing with their own educational and personal journey. For example, focusing too much on grammar or pronunciation might create barriers to some and hence be counterproductive, while focusing on meaning and appropriacy might yield better results. If your OLIve, programme or course teaches two languages, consider bilingual slides or other interventions that encourage multilingualism.

2.2 Be prepared for a multi-level classroom. Think about whether you will need to divide people into groups according to their proficiency, whether you will need to provide different activities to different people or groups of people, and what those activities are.

2.3Slow down. Teaching refugees and asylum seeker students can be different than teaching other students who deal with less barriers and trauma. Also be aware that receptive skills (listening and reading) almost always progress more quickly than productive skills (speaking and writing). [60]

[59] Pouspourika, K. (2020)

[60] UNHCR (2019b)

2.4 **Be clear about goals.** Some students will be headed for official language exams which will have existing requirements. If you are teaching towards them, make sure that you are well-informed about what the students will need to do and direct your practice towards meeting those needs.

3. In the classroom

3.1 **Emphasise the students' existing skills.** Give students an opportunity to demonstrate the linguistic and cultural knowledge they bring with them into the classroom. There are different exercises you can offer them. Ask your cohort to tell you about the languages they already speak and write them on the board: a cohort of 10-15 students often speaks more than 20 languages. Seeing this often creates a positive moment for the students, where they feel aware of their own capabilities. You can also ask for the meaning of the students' names, or a word in the students' own language, which they then have to translate. This creates a moment of intercultural communication as the students will often be interested in each other's culture and language and offer commentary. [61]

3.2 **Emphasise what will be easy.** If they are learning English, point out that they will be able to practice with other students and that they can have easy access to media in English whenever they are able to have access to the internet. If they are learning the local language, point out that being located in a country where the language they are learning is spoken will certainly make things easier.

3.3 **Give clear instructions.** Simplifying your language will be essential. It is good to be informal, but if your conversational register means that you are using words that the students don't know or that your flow makes it easier for them to understand you, you will have to recalibrate.

[61] Interview with Petra Herczeg, University of Vienna

3.4 **Be patient.** Language learners might need to hear a new word 40 times or more before they have acquired it for their own use and are able to use it in the correct way and place grammatically. Be ready to repeat as many times as the students need. They will also be the ones to set the pace at which they need to learn, which as discussed in the introduction may be slower than other learners.

3.5 **Ask concept-checking questions.** Rather than asking "Do you understand?", ask questions which allow the students to demonstrate if they have understood directions or vocabulary words (British Council). "Do you read first or answer the questions first?" "Can you point to someone who is wearing red?" "Can you name three different animals that hibernate?"

3.6 **Make students work with each other.** This makes them strengthen their cooperative skills, can bring them to know each other better, and it is also an enjoyable way to practice their speaking and listening skills.

3.7 **Prioritise structure.** When a student has acquired enough basic vocabulary to understand some of what's going on in the classroom environment, their brain will naturally begin to prioritise structure, and so the category of a word (noun, verb, particle) is more important for the language learning brain than the "correct" word choice. Learning structure is invisible and takes a lot more brain energy than learning the parts that fit into the structure.

3.8 **Offer a chance to self-correct**. Provide corrective feedback when you sense that a learner knows the rules, but has made a mistake, so the learner has a chance to self-correct, feel accomplished and build the neural pathways for correct usage. If they can't self-correct, do not linger on them so they do not feel put on the spot. A refresher lesson and concentrated practice will probably help them.

3.9 **Encourage them to express opinions.** Freedom to express themselves through opinions on textbooks, literature, art in group activities with teachers who are engaging and supportive will

showcase their wide range of abilities and interests, enhance language acquisition and provide another opportunity to build confidence. As the students become comfortable with speaking their mind, they have a better chance of learning. [62]

3.10 **Do not correct all the time.** Think about what you want to correct and let slide. Students may appear shy because they do not want to risk making a linguistic mistake in front of peers. Correcting every single mistake will make this worse. A fun and relaxing classroom environment helps to lower anxiety. [63]

4. Outside the classroom

4.1 Encourage students to start from their interests. Whether they are into sports, art, law or cooking, students can start from looking into the fields and hobbies that interest them, one word at a time. They can use Google translate or a dictionary to build a vocabulary, and they can bring their findings to class to be shared and worked on.

4.2 **Encourage daily practice.** Advise the students to use the language they are learning every day. Whether they talk to natives, read books and magazines, or simply translate words in their mind, the more they use the language the faster they will learn it. Suggest to beginners strategies such as attaching post-it's with names to their personal objects.

4.3 **Encourage communication with locals.** Daily communication is key to the process. Migrants form bonds with each other. Staying close with your family, friends, or just people that come from the same country creates a safe place. A lot of migrants are looking for a safe place. However, this also creates a problem, seeing as a large number

[62] UNHCR (2019b)

[63] Pouspourika, K. (2020)

of migrants refuse to interact with natives, usually because of fear that they will not be able to communicate properly as well as the fact that their effort will not be received properly. Daily communication might be scary, but it is essential and a great way to slowly learn a new language.

4.4 Offer language tools and resources.

Offline: Make sure that the students know where the university library is and how to access it. If you can print, consider giving the students handouts they can continue to work on in their spare time. If you know of any libraries or community centres that may have free books locally, direct the students towards them so they are able to access them. If your students have access to smartphones or laptops, send them and guide them on how to download pdfs they can read when not connected to the internet.

Online: Make sure they know how to use Google translate. There is also an explosion of free and paid language learning tools specifically created to teach foreign languages easily, without the help of a teacher. If your students have a smartphone or access to a computer, these tools can give them the boost they need. Although in most cases those tools are not able to help a person become fluent, they are a great way to start. Online tools include language learning apps such as Duolingo, which also has a web version, or Busuu. People can choose the language they want, start completing stages, competing with friends, and so on. Some language learning apps have an offline version: 50LANGUAGES and Memrise allow users to practice wherever they are, with or without an internet connection.

4.5 Direct them towards other language-based activities.

Offline: Talk to your local organisers, teachers and current and former students about what organisations in your vicinity offer services to refugees and asylum seekers that might help them

improve their language. Local NGOs, charities and trusts will often have something the students can participate in, whether it is a language course, an intercultural mingling space or a poetry club. The students may be shy approaching a local activity and need encouragement and reassurance that it will welcome them. Consider taking the students to a session of this activity towards the end of your course, so that they know that they can continue learning outside the classroom and exactly when, where and how.

Online: seminars and webinars can help students learn some important phrases and start to understand how they should communicate with the locals. After all, we must never forget that communication is not just about the language. It is about local idiosyncrasies, body language, and tone of voice. Everything is important when communicating, and students should get practice any way they can. [64]

[64] Pouspourika, K. (2020)

Module 4: Academic skills

"The specific need that I wanted to be met was to be able to explore the academic syllabus, and also just to find myself within the setting of the university." [65]

Preparing students to enter or re-enter education is one of the main goals of OLIve, and the students will often join the programme because this is their final goal. Because of this, it can be relatively easy to motivate them through these classes, but to be successful in them they also need not to feel overwhelmed and build their confidence. This is relevant to any course or programme which shares similar goals.

1. **How to present the course**

   Explain to the students which activities they are going to be undertaking in a clear and concise way. For example, your OLIve, programme or course may offer academic writing and presentation tutoring. Tell the students that they will be writing short essays in

[65] Interview with Pearlgin Lindiwe Goba, University of East London

preparation for the assignments they will have to do at university, and then in the presentation skills you will be working with Powerpoint, which is a programme to make slides to show while the students are speaking to an audience. Explain to them how this is necessary because they will gain IT skills and public speaking will be a part of the students' activities in university too. Furthermore, they can improve their language skills.

Moreover, these classes, together with one-on-one tutoring opportunities, represent their best chance to understand the application system in their arrival country. Explain to them that paperwork is a language of its own, and that even if they feel confident in English or the local language, they may need support to understand the forms. Even local students do!

2. **Preparation**

2.1 **Know educational requirements in your country.** Your OLIve, programme or course may have information about what the application system is like in your country. Familiarise yourself with it, especially if you plan on assisting the students step by step. If entering university requires submitting a personal statement and passing an interview, you will have to make sure those activities are included in the curriculum so that students can practice.

2.2 **Know about student finance.** Being admitted into university is only the first step: your students will need financial support in order to be able to actually benefit from the offer. While you cannot be expected to know the details of all opportunities in your country, having a basic understanding of how student finance works in your country works so you can answer questions is beneficial. This might involve EU or state support or scholarships. If you are not able to gain this, make sure you have contacts to someone who does, either at OLIve or at an external organisation.

2.3 **Make sure there is time.** The last thing your students need is to add deadline stress to their existing preoccupations. Set early deadlines for everything you want to be sure the students will do, so they (and you) don't have to deal with it at the last minute.

3. In the classroom

3.1 **Start from the beginning.** Rather than talk about education, have the students talk about themselves. Do they have work experience in their origin country? Did they have a qualification for that? Or maybe they were in education, but they didn't have a chance to work yet? What did they study? What did they like and dislike about it? Do they have plans about what they want to study or work as in the future? All these are helpful questions which can help you understand the students' background and the students clarify their plans to themselves. Some OLIve teachers use worksheets for this.[66]

3.2 **Practice basic skills.** Academic skills courses usually revolve around essay writing, but the students will need a wide range of basic skills in university, e.g., note-taking, studying, critical thinking, literacy and numeracy, and organizational skills. What may be obvious to you may not be obvious to your students. Make sure they have their basic skills sorted. For example, an exercise about note-taking can involve giving the students some content they must resume, first in a few sentences, then in a few words.

3.3 **Explain what academic language is for.** If students think that academic language is just a more complicated way of saying the same things, it may be difficult to interest them in it. You may have better results if you explain that academic language allows us to communicate in a more precise and efficient way about concepts in a certain field, which is something that we already do in a number of life situations. For example, if you break an arm the doctor will not ask you to get a scan at the "machine working with electromagnetic

[66] Interview with Jessica Oddy, University of East London

radiation", they will say to go get an "x-ray". In the same way, if you study philosophy, you don't say "the theory of the nature of knowledge", you say "epistemology".

3.4 **Teach about sources.** Students who have not been in education before may need to learn how to identify reliable sources, how to quote them and how to steer clear of plagiarism. This is usually best accomplished through practice and can be taught in conjunction with IT skills, if your OLIve, programme or course offers the possibility to do so. For example, you can have sessions teaching students how to use Google, how to reference and how to paraphrase, and then give them material they have to decode as plagiarised or not.

3.5 **Teach IT.** Your OLIve, programme or course might have separate provisions for this, but if not, this class is an easy place to start. Digital literacy is key to social inclusion and will help the students inside and outside the classroom. OLIve staff have written about their experiences teaching IT as a valuable lesson for those of us who are wondering about best practice (Esenowo and Lounasmaa). While most IT learning at OLIve is done through computers, apps such as Kahoot! can be a fun addition to the learning environment.[67] An article on teaching IT at OLIve is forthcoming and can be referred to as an important resource on the matter (Esenowo, I., 2020).

4. Outside the classroom

4.1 Check on the students. You may need to make sure that they are on top of their university or funding applications and they may be uncomfortable asking for help. Reminder emails, or, if you want to be more involved, WhatsApp groups are a good idea.

4.2 Promote participation in academic activities. Invite the students to conferences, seminars and other activities your university might be hosting. Be aware that they may not feel welcome there and so

[67] Interview with Israel Esenowo, University of East London.

accompanying them might be a good idea. Active participation should also be encouraged as many academic events have migration and refugees as a topic and not as participants. For example, OLIve students in London have a conference group where discussions and creative practice are facilitated by tutors into conference presentations.

Module 5: Creative skills

"All the worries, all the pain and all the things going through my head, I start to put them onto a paper... I start to pull out happiness out of the pain and try to find remedies."[68]

Different OLIve locations have offered diverse creative skills courses in, among others, visual storytelling, creative writing, poetry and performance. These courses usually run in later slots during the weekend programme, can be shorter than the full duration of it, and are optional. This type of course is ubiquitous across Europe and the UK as creative methodologies offer students ways to express themselves which do not necessarily depend on language.

1. **How to present the course**

Encouraging students to join can occasionally be difficult. Many students might have a pragmatic approach focusing on language, academic and job skills or may not have had the experience of being taught creative skills

[68] Interview with Bee, University of East London

while in previous education. Because of this, they may not be interested in a creative course at first sight. It is therefore important to contextualise the uses of creativity and the benefits that the students may gain from joining a creative skills course. As before, it is also helpful to be precise and concrete about the course content. For example, asking them if they want to join a course in creative writing where you will write and read literature and poetry might not yield good results. It may be better to ask them if they want to join a course in creative writing where they will exercise their English in a fun way, learn how to write about themselves in a way that might be useful to them for their personal statement and also watch clips of poetry and read extracts from books.

2. Preparation

2.1 Think about your pedagogy. Many of your students may not be familiar with activities that mobilise their creativity. Start in a simple and encouraging way that stresses the fact that everyone has creative skills and can express them, and that the class is not about being "good" at something. Provide simple icebreaker exercises that everyone can do and will boost their confidence.

2.2 Decolonise your curriculum. It can be very discouraging for students not to feel represented by the materials you are teaching them. In the case of creative skills, it is very important that they feel that people who inhabit their positionality have a place in practicing artistic disciplines. Think about whether the materials you are giving them reflect the diversity of the classroom, whether the students will be able to see themselves in what they are spectating or reading, and whether your curriculum promotes intercultural and antiracist values.

2.3 Adjust to the students' needs and wishes. Although they can support them, skills courses are not strictly in preparation to language needs or academic practice. As such, you have a wider range and better opportunities to respond to what the students wish to explore. If you strike a topic or a form that the students are

interested in, you should latch on to that interest and respond with material and practice that address it.

3. In the classroom

3.1 Be compassionate. Life writing, poetry, performance, vlogging and many other forms can tap into life experience in ways which we might not be ready for, especially when we have been exposed to trauma. An exercise which may be fun and lighthearted for some can bring up painful memories for others. For example, asking students to write or talk about their childhood home may cause melancholy, sadness or even grief to those who lost the place and the people in it traumatically. However, many students report that tapping into these experiences in the safer space of a creative skills course can actually be cathartic. Instead of avoiding potentially distressing topics altogether, make sure you are ready to be supportive, respectful and compassionate if they trigger feelings. See the **Trauma-informed Teaching module** for more.

3.2 Adjust to language proficiency. If your class is not very proficient in the language you are teaching in, you may want to use strategies to make sure that they do not feel this hinders their creativity. For example, you can teach them how to use visual storytelling techniques: make your students compose a photostory about getting a cup of coffee by taking pictures, without any need for words.[69] Or you can assign an exercise where they write a poem by joining words in English and words in their home language; as discussed in the Language and communication module, this spotlights and promotes appreciation for skills they already have.

3.3 Use a wide variety of activities and materials. You will have to work within a multi-level classroom and make sure everyone is included and everyone's different skills are valued. Make sure your activities and materials are varied enough to accommodate personal

[69] Interview with Matthew Daintrey-Hall, Central European University

experience and critical thinking, but also fun. For example, as part of a creative writing class about point of view, you can make the students listen to a piece of spoken word poetry for "I", a reading and discussion of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "The Thing Around Your Neck"[70] for "you", and an exercise about writing a description of a person whose photo you pick from a hat for "he/she/they".

3.4 Do not prod. This is even more important than in a regular classroom as people may be making personal disclosures or feel even more shy than usual due to the nature of the work they are presenting. Moreover, some students enjoy working with their own life experience, but some do not and report that the main benefit they derived from this type of activity is actually not having to think about their own issues. Give people the opportunity to share their work, but be prepared for it to be declined and ready to move on to the next activity. In some cases, it may be helpful to be doing the same exercise as the students so you have a version of it to use as an ice-breaker when sharing and as a way of balancing out the power dynamics of disclosure in the group by offering something of your own.

3.5 Do not correct language unless asked to. Students already have language and academic skills classes. Explain that something that is viewed as a mistake in a university or job context can be interesting and different in a creative context. For example, if your class is in English you can explain that there are many different variations of English around the world, and while some are treated as more correct than others, everything is correct and valid in literature and poetry. Show an example like Linton Kwesi Johnson's Inglan is a Bitch[71] or or Yomi Sode's Stretch.[72] Focus on creativity rather than results unless the students explicitly ask you to do differently.

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70 Adichie (2007)

71 Kwesi Johnson, L. (1980)

72 Sode, Y. (2018)

4. Outside the classroom

4.1 Provide materials. When presented with a creative interest they haven't cultivated before or in a while, many students simply do not know where to start. Be ready to offer additional material they can physically take with them at the end of the class, such as printouts of poems or short stories, or to send out links to Youtube videos by email or Whatsapp so they can easily access them in their spare time and continue exploring while not in the classroom.

4.2 Provide opportunities to practice. Creative practice may be beneficial to the student and part of their own journey. Encourage them to continue what they are doing in the classroom in their own time, but also provide concrete opportunities to do so. These may be optional exercises and readings that they may do in their own time, without pressure. You may also point them towards creative activities taking place in the vicinities, such as free art workshops, book clubs etc. The students may be shy approaching a local activity and need encouragement and reassurance that it will welcome them. Consider taking the students to a session of this activity towards the end of your course, so that they know that they can continue learning outside OLIve and exactly when, where and how.

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Credits

These teacher training materials include contributions from a range of OLIve current and former staff from Central European University and Open Education (Budapest, Hungary), University of Vienna (Austria), Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece), University of East London (UK) and Bard College Berlin (Germany), as well as feedback from a number of students.

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Abstract

What is a welcoming learning environment? What does that mean in the specific context of refugee education? How can teachers and practitioners create and promote welcoming environments that are responsive to the needs of their students?

This teacher training guide on **Creating and Promoting Welcoming Learning Environments** collates some of the collective experience from the first 4 years of OLIve (Open Learning Initiative), an Erasmus+ founded project in 5 universities which focuses on introducing and re-introducing forced migrant students to higher education, offering access to better opportunities in their country of arrival and giving opportunities for intellectual exchange. The materials are based on 25 interviews with teachers, practitioners and students and on the existing body of literature produced about and by OLIve. They bring together the history of this refugee education programme in Europe and the UK, reflections on critical

and decolonial pedagogy and practice, and tips for teachers and practitioners in the subject areas of languages, academic and creative skills. They are intended to serve as an inspiration for best practice to anyone approaching refugee education, and as a reflection and critique on the role of the university in supporting forced migrant students within institutions that by and large do not cater to their needs.

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